

---

≡ Menu

---

Explaining the world, daily

## The Economist explains

---



The Economist explains

# Why the pope has taken control of the Knights of Malta

The Vatican clashes with an ancient chivalric order

Feb 7th 2017

BY J.H.

ON FEBRUARY 2nd, Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Angelo Becciu as his special delegate to the Order of the Knights of Malta, an exclusive, centuries-old Roman Catholic fellowship. He told him to collaborate with the Order's acting head for the "reconciliation between all its members" and to work for its "spiritual and moral renewal". The letter in which he gave these instructions completed a

virtual takeover of the Order that began on January 24th when the pope forced the resignation of the order's grand master, a 67 year-old Briton, Matthew Festing. What is going on?

Popes have occasionally sent representatives in to crack the whip over monastic orders suspected of veering from the doctrinal straight-and-narrow. But the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which defended pilgrims to the Holy Land during the Crusades, is an order of chivalry. And a singular one. Like countries, the Order has sovereignty (its knights having previously ruled Malta). Yet it no longer has territory beyond its headquarters on the fashionable Via Condotti in Rome. From there it dispatches ambassadors and issues stamps, coins and even

Already signed up? [Log in](#)

## Choose us for news analysis that respects your time and intelligence

Get up to **80% off** a quarterly subscription with *The Economist*

---

First 12 weeks for ~~£65~~ £12

[View subscription options →](#)

*Cancel at any time. Subscription auto-renews every 12 weeks at full price.*

---

- ✓ We **filter out the noise** of the daily news cycle and analyse the trends that matter
- ✓ We give you rigorous, deeply researched and fact-checked journalism. That's why Americans named us their **most trusted news source** in 2017
- ✓ **Available wherever you are**—in print, digital and, uniquely, in audio, fully narrated by professional broadcasters



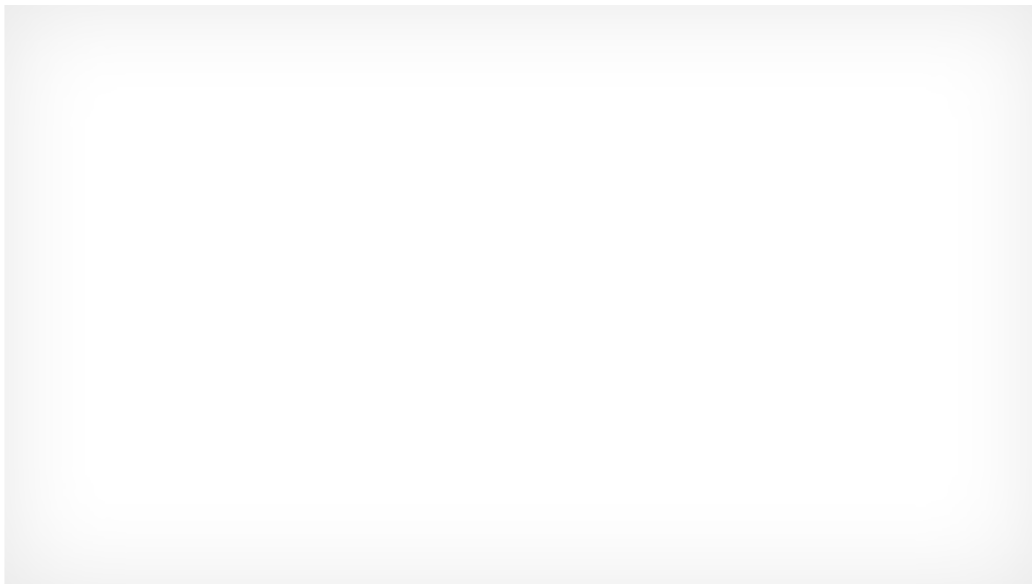
This website adheres to all nine of NewsGuard's standards of credibility and transparency.

OR

**Continue reading this article**

[Register with an email address](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



**More from The Economist explains**



Getty Images

Every breath they take

## How air pollution can ruin schoolchildren's lives

THE ECONOMIST EXPLAINS

The Economist explains

## How European Commissioners are appointed

THE ECONOMIST EXPLAINS



Getty Images

The Economist explains

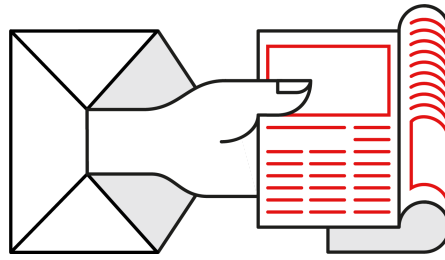
## Why Japan and South Korea bicker

THE ECONOMIST EXPLAINS



EPA





# The best of our journalism, handpicked each day

*Sign up to our free daily newsletter, The Economist today*

→ **Sign up now**

**Subscribe**

**Contact us**

**Group subscriptions**

**Help**

---

**Keep updated**



Published since September 1843 to take part in “*a severe contest between intelligence, which presses forward, and an unworthy, timid ignorance obstructing our progress.*”

---

**Apps & media**

The Economist apps

Economist Films

Podcasts

**Other publications**

1843 Magazine

The World in

The World If

## The Economist

About

Careers

Advertise

Reprints

Press centre

## The Economist Group

Economist Group

Which MBA?

The Economist Store

Executive Education Navigator

---

[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookie Policy](#) [Manage Cookies](#) [Accessibility](#) [Modern Slavery Statement](#)

[Do Not Sell My Personal Information](#)

Copyright © The Economist Newspaper Limited 2019. All rights reserved.

